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DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE
AF/AS FRAZER
PASS TO AF/W

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OVIP](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE'S TRIP TO COTE D'IVOIRE

Classified By: AMB WNESBITT FOR REASONS 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: The Deputy Secretary and AF Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer were well-received by government and

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opposition leaders as well as UN officials during their November 10-11 visit to Abidjan. In all of his meetings, the Deputy explained that the purpose of his visit was to better understand the political situation in Cote d'Ivoire and to encourage Ivorian efforts to resolve the crisis. He consistently underscored the importance of the government implementing the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) without delay. He acknowledged the progress that has been made so far, and stressed that the holding of elections would allow for broader bilateral engagement by the USG. End Summary.

12. (U) The Deputy met first with Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, next with opposition leaders, and then with President Laurent Gbagbo. Representatives from civil society shared their views of the political situation during a working lunch. A discussion with UNOCI representatives ended the day's meetings. Implementation of the OPA, and the government's commitment to doing so, was a key topic in every meeting. The need to simultaneously deal with election preparation and DDR issues became clearer throughout the day.

OPA Implementation and Election Preparations

13. (C) The Prime Minister and President echoed each other in their comments regarding the implementation of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement. Soro and Gbagbo each stressed their commitment to the OPA but said they could not move more quickly without additional financial resources. Both urged the international donor community to be more forthcoming with needed financial assistance. (Note: the World Bank and other donors have funds that can be disbursed, but the government must meet certain conditions. Septel will address this issue in detail.) The Prime Minister described the actions his government has taken to implement the OPA since coming to power in April but acknowledged that work was behind schedule; only 25 of 111 planned mobile courts (audiences foraines) are operating. Soro stressed that progress is being made, noting that under his tenure Cote d'Ivoire is making debt payments for the first time since 12002. He cited the selection on November 9 of a technical operator to produce new ID cards as another sign of forward momentum. The Deputy Secretary encouraged both Soro and Gbagbo to demonstrate their commitment by implementing the OPA as quickly as possible, noting that a resolution of the crisis would enable the USG to expand its engagement with Cote d'Ivoire.

14. (C) President Gbagbo told the Deputy that no one was more eager to have elections than he, but that the ground needed to be properly prepared. He said that he would have been willing to hold elections based on an updated 2000 electoral list, but the OPA required that the audiences foraines process take place. This was an expensive endeavor and required much more international assistance. Gbagbo complained that the international community did not want to give him funds until after elections. He could not get to elections without international funding of identification and the DDR process. DDR was now stalled because of insufficient funding for the retraining centers (Service Civique). Gbagbo said that contrary to what the opposition says, delaying elections is worse for him, as those who win elections can govern better because they have a mandate from the public, and they can select their own cabinet without the requirement to appoint opposition party members. The Deputy Secretary commented at one point that if President Gbagbo had made a strategic commitment to implement the OPA, everything else would follow. Gbagbo asked about the meaning of the term 'strategic commitment', and seemed not to fully grasp the concept. However, Gbagbo told the Deputy that elections will take place definitely by July 2008 at the latest.

15. (C) Opposition party leaders welcomed the USG's call for implementation of the OPA without delay. RDR (Rally of Republicans) party leader and former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara opined that the government does not need financial assistance. If funds are lacking, he said, it is due to government mismanagement of resources. Ouattara claimed that PM Soro had very little real power, and criticized President Gbagbo for consistently dragging his feet on key issues. For example, he said the President has still not signed decrees authorizing the reconstitution of civil registers that were destroyed in the conflict. Gbagbo, he said, consistently

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does just enough to give the impression of forward movement while ensuring through his supporters that there is no real progress. PDCI (Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire) Secretary General Djedje Mady made a similar point, noting that OPA implementation was supposed to be completed in ten months but eight months have already elapsed, virtually no progress has been made, and there is no indication that the international community will hold Gbagbo's feet to the fire.

16. (C) Ouattara and Mady both doubted that President Gbagbo has the political will to implement the OPA, and lamented the government's apparent unwillingness to keep the political parties apprised of developments. Both opposition party leaders stressed that they should not be excluded from a dialogue about implementation of the OPA or election preparations because they chose not to resort to the use of armed force. Ouattara pointed out that 40 percent of all mayors in Cote d'Ivoire are from the RDR; the PDCI holds a majority of the seats in the National Assembly. Ouattara specifically asked the Deputy Secretary to raise with President Compaore the importance of having regular meetings of the Permanent Consultation Framework (according to the OPA this group would include Compaore, Gbagbo, Soro, Ouattara, and Bedie) to ensure that the opposition has a voice in the political process.

DDR and Security Concerns

17. (C) The Deputy Secretary discussed with government and with UN officials the question of disarmament and re-establishing a national army. PM Soro said that he and President Gbagbo had agreed to a disarmament scheme that involved the creation of a "service civique" (civic service). Soro said it was unrealistic to believe that those with arms would just give up their weapons and go home; they need a means of supporting themselves. The service civique, as he described it, would provide training to individuals who will

not be integrated into a new national army to enable them to learn a skill. Soro said he hoped to launch the service civique in January 2008, a timeframe that theoretically could lead to significant percentage of forces being disarmed before an election is held. President Gbagbo also cited the service civique as a critical factor to establishing the right security environment for elections.

¶18. (C) UNOCI Deputy Force Commander Mouhamadou Kandji stated categorically that he sees no commitment from either side to disarm at this time. Cote d'Ivoire, he said, still has two distinct armies with two distinct chains of command. While there are six mixed brigades along the former Zone of Confidence, no reintegration of forces has occurred. UNOCI DDR expert Jean Luc Stalon confirmed that a traditional DDR process is no longer a priority for the government. Acting SRSG Abou Moussa and UNOCI reps also pointed out that the OPA effectively removed UNOCI from direct involvement in discussions between the New Forces and the National Army (FANCI), meaning that the UN is no longer in a position to bring the parties together to push them towards agreement. And despite months of discussions and many meetings, the government and New Forces have evidently failed to reach agreement on any of the major DDR issues.

¶19. (C) UN officials agreed that there was still a complete lack of trust between the parties and that in the absence of trust, both the PM and President were likely to want to keep their forces intact for leverage until after the elections. Abou Moussa thought this was highly undesirable and that a single national army needed to be in place to provide the proper security environment for an election. Opposition leaders Ouattara and Mady had raised similar concerns earlier in the day. PDCI SecGen Mady stressed that it would be difficult for candidates to campaign nationwide in the absence of DDR. Ouattara said there are too many guns in Cote d'Ivoire, not a good harbinger for the future given that any election result is likely to be contested by the losing party/individual.

¶10. (C) The Deputy Secretary raised with UN officials the government's notion of a "service civique". UNOCI reps were generally favorable but thought it would be critical for a neutral third party to be involved to ensure that the service accomplishes its intended goals. Regarding a possible resumption of hostilities, A/SRSG Moussa said he thought it was highly unlikely, while General Kandji noted that Ivorians lacked the capability to resume the war.

¶11. (C) Comment: The Deputy Secretary's visit was an ideal opportunity for the USG to send a message to Cote d'Ivoire's

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leaders that implementation of the OPA is their best chance of moving beyond crisis mode. There was greater harmony in the messages we received from the Prime Minister, the President, and the Foreign Minister than we have previously seen, a sign that the government wanted to make a positive impression. Several interlocutors pressed the Deputy Secretary to have President Compaore of Burkina Faso put

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greater pressure on Gbagbo to move quickly, an indication that Compaore is perceived as only of the only people who can influence the Ivorian president. We do not expect that implementation of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement will be greatly accelerated but there is appreciation for the fact that the USG has delivered a strong message of support for the OPA and hope that will have a positive impact on events.

¶12. (U) This cable was cleared by A/S Frazer and D staff.
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